

Tools for farmland access and protection in Massachusetts

NOFA/Mass Conference
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Agenda and Goals

Agenda

- ❖ What is the Farmland Action Plan (MFAP) and how is it being implemented?
- ❖ How does the MFAP connect with other initiatives?
- ❖ State land licensing program
- ❖ Benefits and tools for leasing and licensing land
- ❖ Questions & Answers

Today's Goals

- ❖ Learn about how MDAR has been encouraging participation in implementation of the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan, including through the Farmland Partnership Program
- ❖ Understand how the MA Farmland Action Plan connects with other initiatives
- ❖ Explore the benefits and tools for leasing and licensing
- ❖ Learn how state lands are being used for agriculture and how this program has recently evolved to better meet the needs of farmers

Who's in the room?

Questions for the audience using mentimeter

1) What type of work do you do in the food system?

- Farmer
- Farm service provider
- Local food advocate
- Land trust
- Government (state or local)
- Research and/or technical analysis
- Other

2) How familiar are you with the MA Farmland Action Plan?

- Never heard of it
- Aware at a high level
- Some familiarity
- Very familiar

3) How familiar are you with the concept of land licensing (eg public lands used for farming)?

- Never heard of it
- Aware at a high level
- Some familiarity
- Very familiar

About the Farmland Action Plan

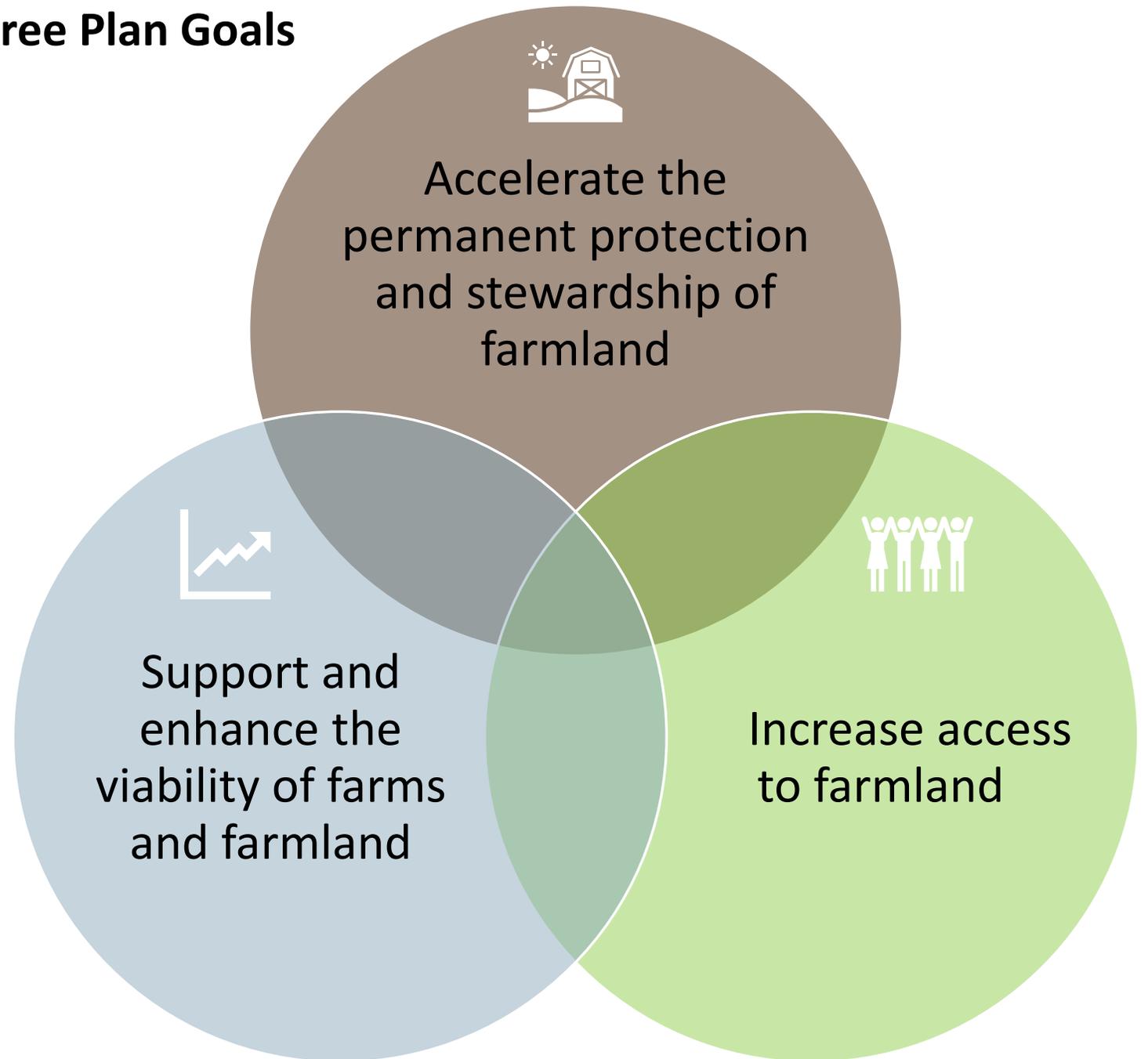
Quick update

For more updates, visit short videos and resources at
www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

What is the Farmland Action Plan?

- State funded
- State coordinated
- Long range strategic initiative
- Statewide, not just for state government
- www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

Three Plan Goals



Important features for implementation

Building partnerships and collaboration

Reducing silos and building shared understanding

Farmland Partnership Program

Coordinator staff position

Evolving approach

Look to the future while learning from the past and other programs

Implementation Matrix - rooted in the Plan, but adjusts as needed

Engagement

MFAP newsletter

Drop-In Sessions

Events and meetings focus on specific tasks

Webpage resources

Keeping the “to do” list up to date

The implementation matrix is a living document that tracks

- Next steps to address needs and challenges
- what partners have done, and
- what partners plan to do.

Published online at

www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan

with updates published as needed

Sort, filter and search for keywords – eg
“food”, “municipality”, “policy”

4-digit unique ID number

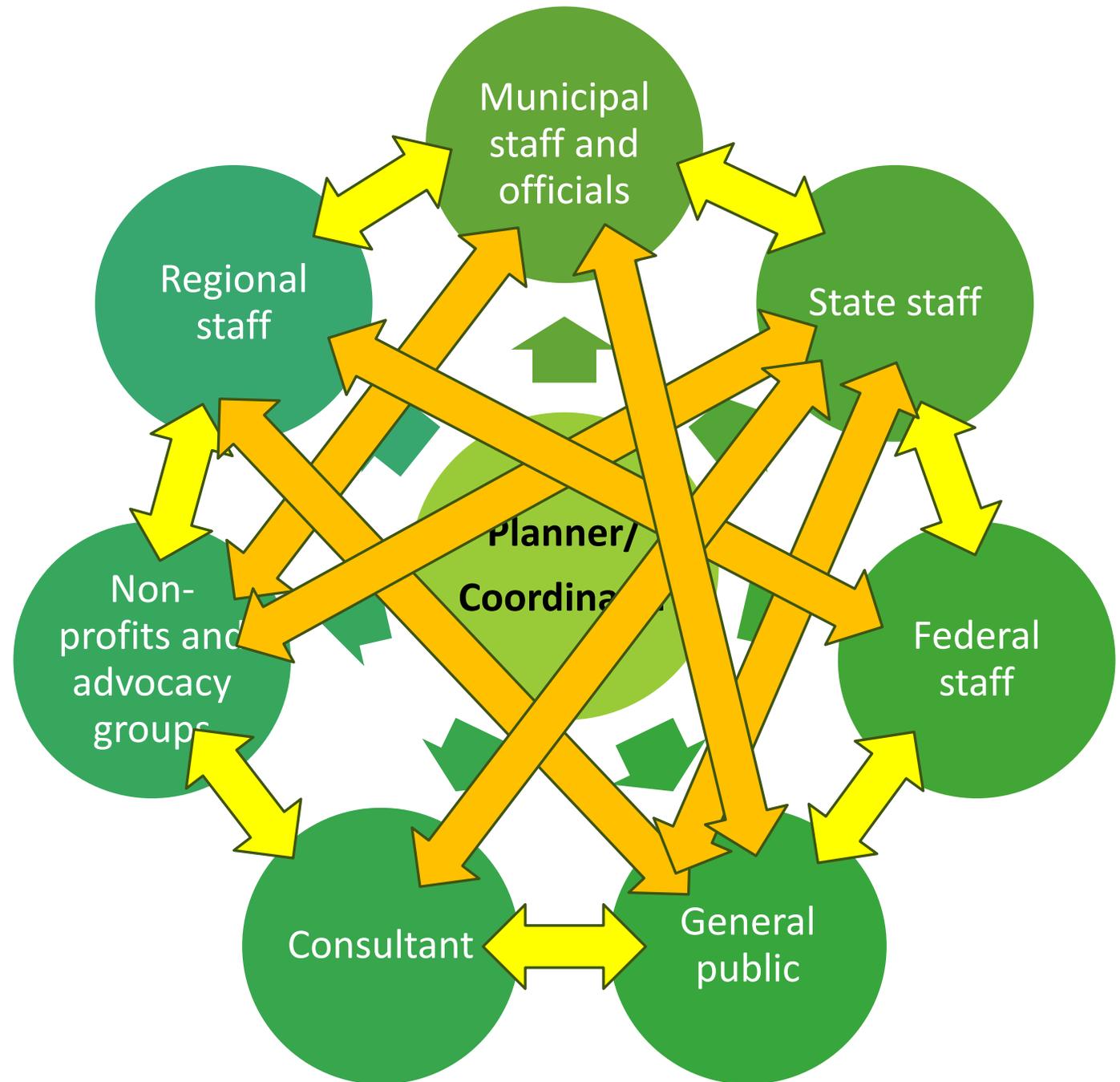


Role of a planner/ coordinator

- Connecting people & resources
- Help with coordination
- Seek and foster opportunities for compromise

“Sometimes the role of government is not to solve problems directly, but rather to play conductor to the orchestra of solution chasers around the country”

Priya Parker - The Art of Gathering.
How we meet and why it matters.



Progress and updates

Learn about recent updates to MDAR programs related to the MFAP, with the 2025 MFAP Progress Report

www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-farmland-action-plan#updates-and-progress-reports

2025 Highlights

1. Start the Farmland Partnership Program
2. Leverage federal funding to protect farmland
3. Leverage non-federal funding to protect farmland
4. Build capacity of entities to protect farmland
5. Build awareness and capacity of municipalities to protect farmland
6. Increase awareness of farmland protection programs
7. Increase applications to farmland protection programs
8. Prioritize protection of whole farms
9. Build state farmland licensing program
10. Expand farmland transfer and succession education and technical assistance



Highlight 10 – Expand farmland transfer and succession education and technical support

Why is this important?

- To ensure that farmland stays in active farming as the existing farmer passes their business and land to the next generation of farmers.

2025 Progress – New Farm-Pass Program

- In 2024 MDAR launched the new Farm-Pass Program which provides direct assistance to help MA farm owners pass their farm on to the next generation.
- Three farms have completed farm transfer plans and eight farms have planning processes underway.
- Learn more on MDAR's [Agricultural Business Assistance webpage](#).

2025 Workshops – Planning for the future of your farm

- MDAR allocated resources and provided funding for the coordination of three public workshops for farmers across the state to discuss a range of farm planning resources.

Implementation through the Farmland Partnership Program

Grant program to help implement the Farmland Action Plan at the local, regional and statewide level.

The goal of the Program is to **build networks of Partners who work together collaboratively and in coordination** to protect farmland, enhance farm viability, and ensure access to farmland.

Learn more at www.mass.gov/info-details/farmland-partnership-program and get updates through the MFAP newsletter

Applications received (May 2025)

- 14 applications requesting \$7.4 million
- Proposed 393 projects to implement specific tasks in the MFAP matrix.

Key characteristics of the Farmland Partnership Program

- Rooted in partnership and collaboration
- Fostering systems change
- Grounded in implementing tasks of the Farmland Action Plan
- Building capacity of partner organizations and staff
- Filling gaps between other funding programs and initiatives

Most of what is outlined in the Farmland Action Plan is there because there is something that needs to be done that hasn't been easy to address.

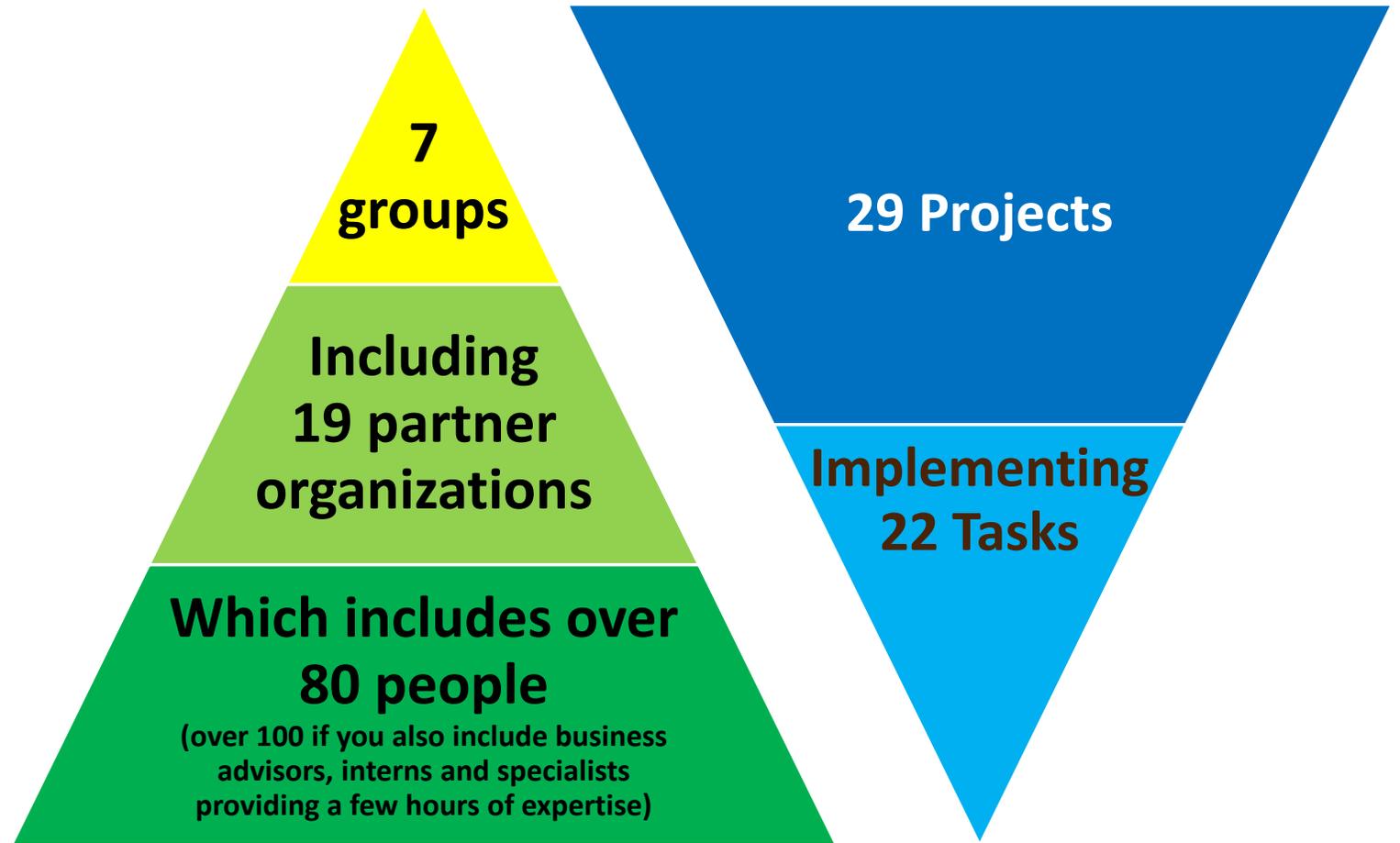
This program is not about doing things the way they've always been done. Instead, it's about reaching to do more or changing how we do things.



By the numbers for 2026-2027 grants

In December 2025, MDAR announced the award of the FY2026 Farmland Partnership Projects which will be implemented over two years from 2026 – 2027.

All projects must be completed by October 31, 2027.



Total awards of \$1.9 million for individual projects and common activities

Overview of Farmland Partnership projects



1 – Protect and steward land

- 8 projects
- Implementing 7 different tasks
- \$315,950 in grant awards
- Includes municipal planning, Chapter 61A, training for surveyors and appraisers



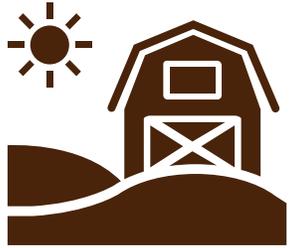
2 – Access to farmland

- 9 projects
- Implementing 7 different tasks
- \$395,724 in grant awards
- Includes land licensing, shared land tenure, transfer planning tools, DEI capacity building



3 – Viability of farms and farmland

- 12 projects
- Implementing 8 different tasks
- \$546,163 in grant awards
- Includes peer mentorship, training people who work with farmers, climate change adaptation, fostering culturally appropriate outreach



Selection of Farmland Protection Projects

Extract from Farmland Partnership Program Factsheet - FRCOG 1.1 (11/10/2025), SRPEDD 1.4 (11/24/2025), SRPEDD 1.2, SRPEDD 1.1 and SRPEDD 1.3 (11/24/2025)

Municipal Farmland Protection Plans (FRCOG 1.1)

Western Massachusetts

- Develop a process and model for developing municipal Farmland Protection Plans with communities of varying sizes and characteristics.
- Identify incentives and barriers that could be addressed that would encourage creation of Farmland Protection Plans.
- Work with 6 municipalities to develop Municipal Farmland Protection Plans.

Lead Partner – Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG)

Education on zoning and planning tools that reduce farmland loss (SRPEDD 1.4)

Southeast Massachusetts

- Provide education on zoning bylaws, best practices, municipal planning documents, and policies/procures related to conservation subdivisions and compact development that supports farmland protection.

Lead Partner – Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD)

Municipal training and workshops on Chapter 61A and Right of First Refusal (ROFR) (SRPEDD 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3)

Southeast Massachusetts

- SRPEDD 1.2 – Engage municipalities and build capacity of municipalities respond to ROFR. Identify needs and resources for restriction-holding entities in relation to 61A preservation.
- SRPEDD 1.1 – Develop and implement a municipal workshop series on topics relevant to preservation of Chapter 61A lands and Right of First Refusal
- SRPEDD 1.3 – Municipal training, topical consulting sessions, and one-on-one technical assistance for municipal representatives in relation to ROFRs and protection of Chapter 61A Properties.

Lead Partner – Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD)



Selection of Farmland Access Projects

Extracts from Farmland Partnership Program Factsheets – WF 2.2, WF 2.1, WF 2.3 (2/23/2026) and NE 2.1, NE 2.2 (12/15/2025)

Education and support for licensing municipal lands (WF 2.1, 2.3 and 2.2)

Statewide

- WF 2.1 – Research and report on existing models and best practices for municipal farmland licensing from municipal and farmer perspectives.
- WF 2.2 – Research and report on existing models and best practices for municipal farmland licensing where historically underserved farmers are prioritized.
- WF 2.3 – Provide education and technical assistance for municipalities developing and implementing a farmland licensing program.

Lead Partner – Massachusetts Food System Collaborative (MAFSC) or World Farmers

Case Study Research on Shared Land Tenure Models (NE 2.1)

Statewide

- Research 10–15 diverse shared land tenure models.
- Write a synthesized report to summarize lessons and inform future models and advocacy.

Lead Partner – New Entry Sustainable Farming Project

Pilot implementation of Shared Land Tenure Site (NE 2.2)

Central Massachusetts

- Pilot shared tenure site with historically underserved farmers.
- Develop operational models, land use agreements and a training curriculum on regenerative practices for climate adaptation.

Lead Implementer – Growing Places

Next steps to consider

Stay in the loop

- Sign up for newsletter – <https://mailchi.mp/mass.gov/farmland-action-plan-updates>
- Farmland Action Plan Webpage www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan
- Farmland Partnership Program Webpage www.mass.gov/info-details/farmland-partnership-program
 - Webinar video introduction to all the projects
 - Project factsheets for all projects

Get involved

- Bring questions to MFAP Drop In Sessions
- Look out for opportunities to get involved – shared in MFAP newsletter

Connecting the MFAP to other initiatives

Other related statewide plans

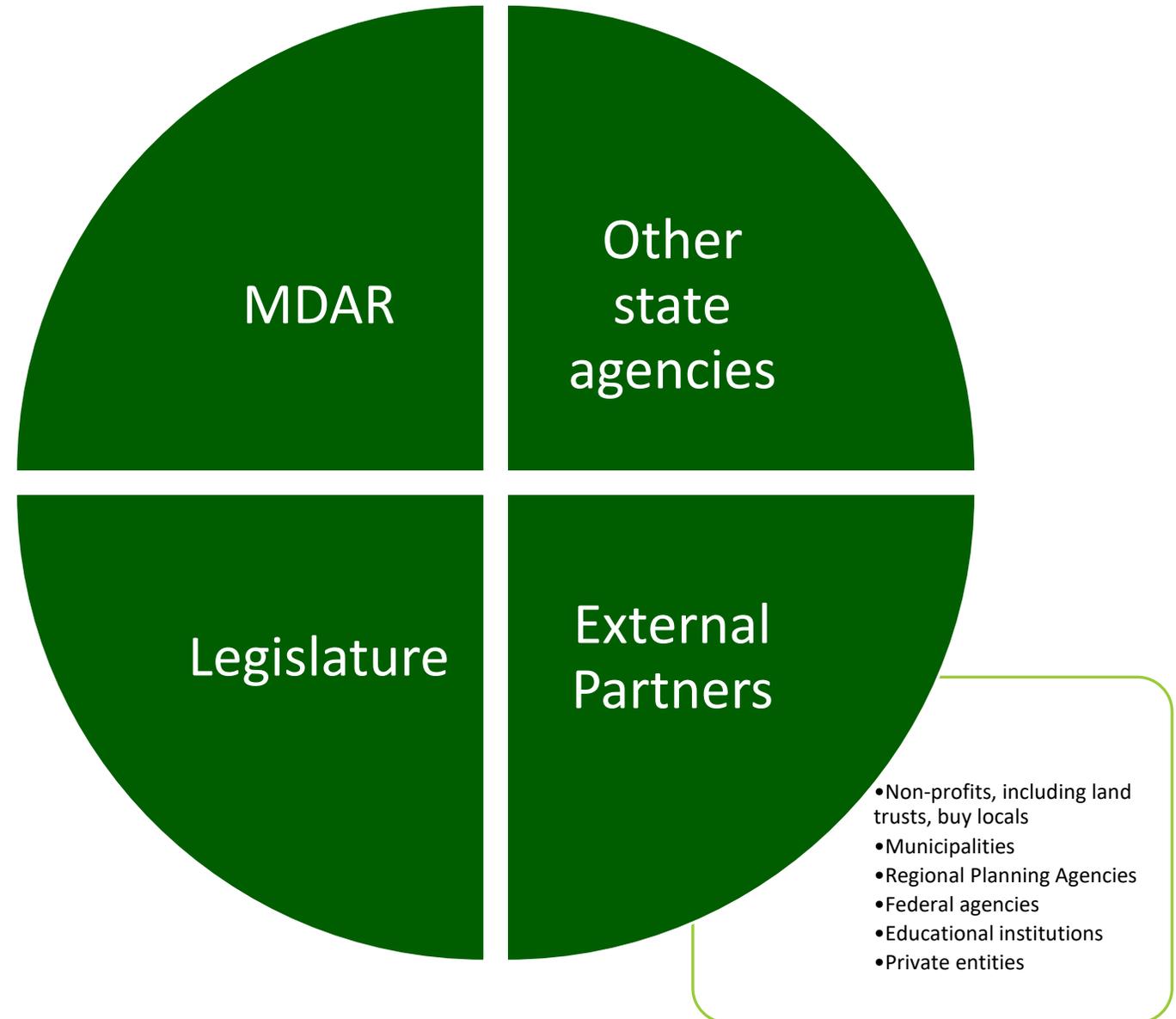
- Local Food Action Plan (2015)
- Decarbonization Road Map (2018)
- Rural Policy Plan (2019)
- Clean Energy & Climate Plan (2022)
- ResilientMass (2023) (State Hazard Mitigation and Climate Adaptation Plan)
- Resilient Lands Initiative (2023)
- Healthy Soils Action Plan (2023)
- Special Commission on Agriculture in the Commonwealth in the 21st Century (2025)
- And others!

Implementation by a wide range of partners

This is a plan for the Commonwealth
of Massachusetts.

MDAR is promoting, monitoring and
facilitating implementation of the
Plan, building momentum from
existing programs and initiatives.

Many other partners are involved with
implementation



State land licensing program

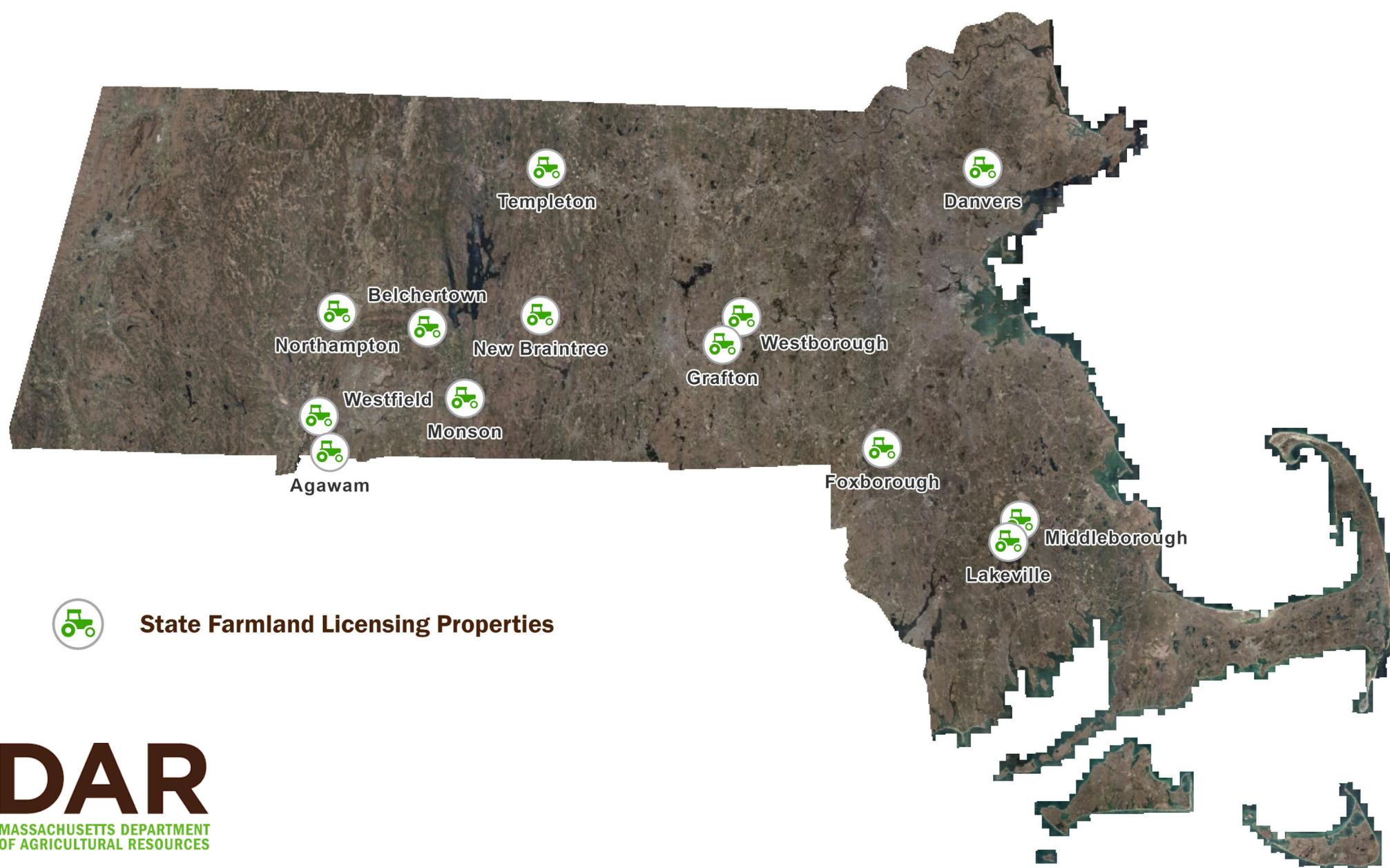
Farmland Licensing as a Conservation Tool

State-Owned Farmland Licensing
Program

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mass.gov/farmlandlicensing





State Farmland Licensing Properties

State Farmland under MDAR Care & Control

- **1981** - Danvers Agricultural Reserve
- **1986** - Hersey Farm, Foxborough
- **1986** - Northampton Agricultural Reserve
- **1994** - Westborough State Hospital, Westborough
- **2006** - Westborough State Hospital, Grafton
- **2007** - Middleborough Agricultural Reserve
- **2007** - Taunton State Hospital, Lakeville
- **2007** - Agawam Criminal Justice Training Center
- **2025** - Templeton Agricultural Reserve
- **Soon** - Lampson Brook in Belchertown
- **Soon** - Monson Development Center

205 acres

68 acres

310 acres

73 acres

10 acres

34 acres

81 acres

44 acres

260 acres

+114.7 acres

+41 acres

**1240
acres**

Managed for other state agencies:

- **Since 2005** - Westfield State Hospital, DMH
- **Since 2016** - New Braintree State Police Academy

41 acres

100 acres

**141
acres**

MDAR'S Farmland Licensing Program

- MDAR licenses stated-owned properties for a period of up to 5 years, with the option to renew for an additional 5 years.
- Affordability and accessibility has increased interest from historically underserved farmers, **a goal identified in the Massachusetts Farmland Action Plan.**
- The program seeks farmers proposing commercial operations and utilize soil conservation BMPs and IPM strategies.





MFAP Highlight 9 – Build state farmland licensing program

Why is this important for access and protection?

- Land licenses are a useful, low-cost mechanism for farmers to access land.
- Land licenses are a useful way to keep public lands in agricultural use for now and the future.

2024 Progress – Updates to applications for licensing state owned land

- Smaller parcels available to farmers
- Request more detail about experience and capacity of farmer applicants
- Priority established for Historically Underserved Farmers

2025 Progress – Infrastructure upgrades for farming on state owned land

- MDAR utilized over \$1 million to field restorations, sign installation, road maintenance, new irrigation and utility infrastructure.



Program Advancements



Capacity

- More license agreements per property
- Case work with licensees around management plan
- Formal approvals of temporary structures
- On site stewardship: meeting with tenants



Infrastructure

- Irrigation (permanent well and river pump systems)
- Solar and grid power connections
- Access road construction and maintenance



Stewardship

- Conservation plan development
- Abandon field restorations (brush hogging/clearing/cover cropping)
- Trash removal
- Erosion management
- Wetland planning

2021

115 acres

Licensed prior by 1 farmer
Experienced lapse in
management



0 295 590 1,180 Feet



2025

46.3 acres

Licensed by 7 farmers
Investments by
landowner (MDAR)

- Wells
- Road Improvements
- High Tunnels
- Department Signage

0 295 590 1,180 Feet

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, iD, OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, iD, OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Esri, USDA, PSA

What is a License vs a Lease?

It can vary in different contexts but generally...

A **license** gives the non-exclusive right from the owner to an individual or entity to use real property for a specific purpose. Unlike a lease, it does not transfer an interest in the real property.

A **lease** is an exclusive right to use the property for all purposes except what is excluded by the agreement.



MDAR Licenses

- ✓ Procured through an open RFR process
- ✓ For commercial agricultural use of the property, as defined by a “land use plan”
- ✓ Includes indemnification language and requires liability coverage held by the licensee, with the licensor listed as “additionally insured”
- ✓ Defines a License Fee to be paid once a year
- ✓ Defines a License Term and potential for Extensions (typically 5 years, with one 5-year extension)
- ✓ Allows for installation of temporary structures

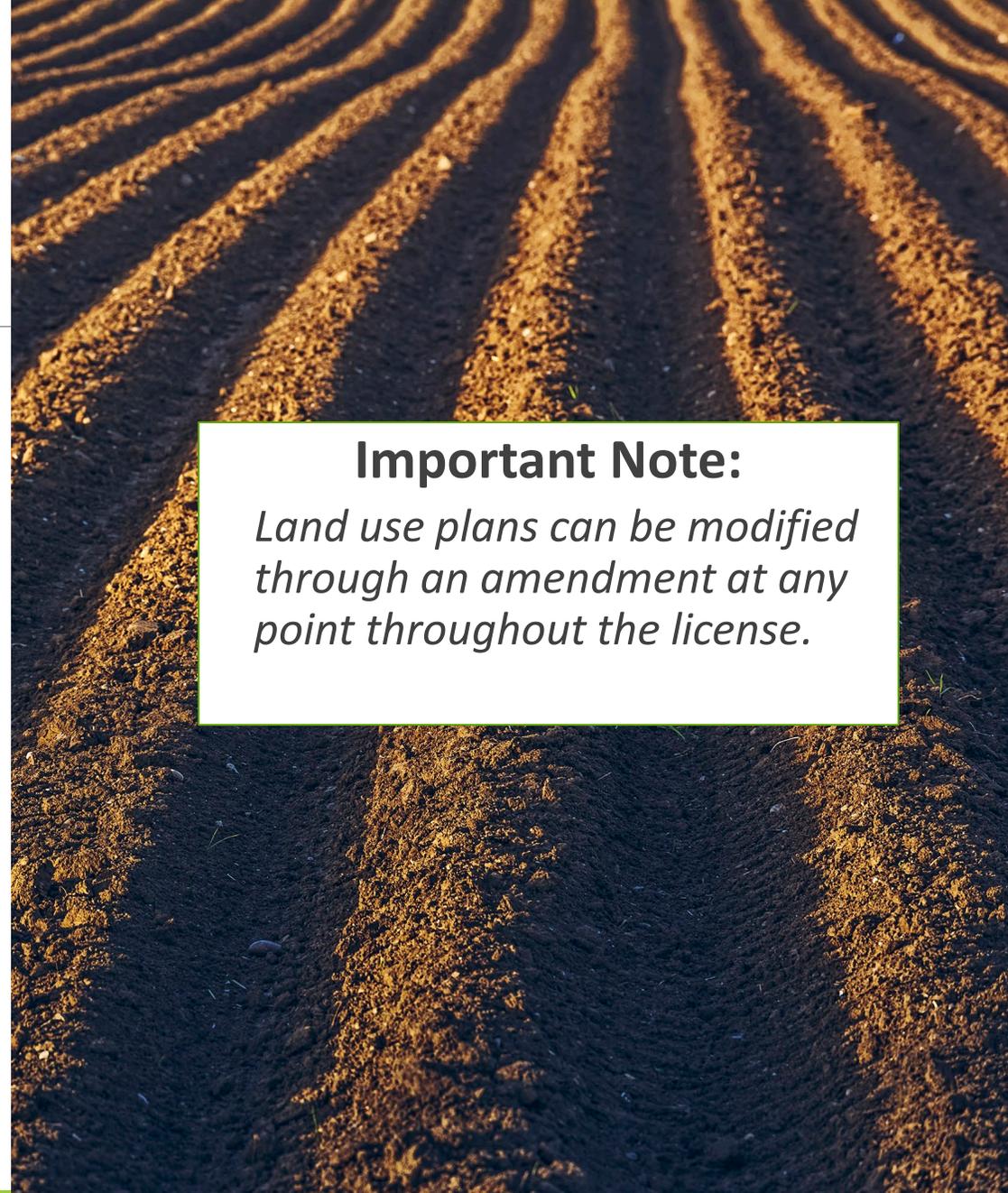
What is a “land use plan”?

What we ask for:

- List of crops grown
- Growing methods
- Areas not to be used for commercial production (storage, wash areas, break areas, etc.)
- Equipment owned
- Equipment to obtain
- Infrastructure needed
- Commercial sales avenues
- Soil health BMPs

Important Note:

Land use plans can be modified through an amendment at any point throughout the license.



Why have a “land use plan”?

- Land use plans are a communication and expectation-setting tool between landowners and land users.
- They can be used for environmental stewardship and long-term soil health management.
- Plans help farmers and licensors with long term planning. They can be used as a goal-setting tool.



Benefits and tools for licensing and leasing

Questions for the audience - Mentimeter

- What are the pros and cons of a license agreement for the farmer?
- What are the pros and cons of a license agreement for the landowner?
- What resources do you use, and who do you ask for help with leases and licenses?

Benefits of leasing and licensing

Low-cost option for farmers AND landowners

Having a good lease can set clear expectations between farmers and landowners

Aids in keeping land in agriculture, even in times of transition or uncertainty

Has flexibility for farmers and owners depending on conditions laid out in agreement

Allows for collaboration between landowners and farmers

Tools for licensing and leasing

- MDAR's State-Owned Farmland Licensing Program - www.mass.gov/farmlandlicensing
- Ag Mediation Programs - www.umb.edu/mopc/programs/agricultural-mediation-program/
- Legal Food Hub - www.legalfoodhub.org
- Municipal Agricultural Commissions - www.mass.gov/info-details/agricultural-commissions

Useful newsletters from MDAR

- Farm and Market Report - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/the-farm-and-market-report>
- EJ newsletter - www.mass.gov/forms/get-environmental-justice-updates-from-mdar

Questions and Comments

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Farmland Action Plan and Farmland Partnership

- Farmland Action Plan Webpage www.mass.gov/farmland-action-plan
- Farmland Partnership Program Webpage www.mass.gov/info-details/farmland-partnership-program

Land Licensing

- Land Licensing Webpage www.mass.gov/farmlandlicensing

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